The Logic of Students' Employment Expectations

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During the course of the IDS Education Project we have concerned ourselves not only with the beliefs and behaviour of employers and policy planners but also with the attitudes and beliefs of the people for whom the planners plan—the children who pass through the various stages of the school system and who enter the labour force. What kinds of employment do students expect to achieve when they leave the school system—and why?

In Table 1 we present a series of data from eleven countries—three of them 'developed' (Great Britain, Japan and the USA) and seven 'developing' (Chile, India, Iran, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Mexico). The table shows for each country the percentage of 14 year olds who **expect**[1] to gain nonmanual jobs when they leave the education system. The nonmanual category covers the conventional ILO groups of professional, managerial, administrative, executive and clerical workers. The data presented in the table for Japan, USA, Chile, India, Iran and Thailand were collected as part of a survey carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 1970. The data from Malaysia, Mexico and Sri Lanka were collected by members of the IDS Education Project between 1975 and 1978.[2]

This table should not be regarded as a league table—the data it draws together are from disparate sources employing varying methodologies, sampling procedures and sample sizes. All the schools from which students were drawn are heavily weighted towards urban and suburban areas. This should not allow us, however, to jump to the conclusion that the data presented for each country are very unrepresentative. Where comparative data were available (eg Malaysia, Great Britain, Japan, USA, India, Sri Lanka), the differences between students from schools situated in urban and rural areas were small. In addition,

Table 1

Proportion of students who expect nonmanual jobs

	1 year	*2 sample size*	*3 percentage expecting nonmanual jobs*	*4 proportion of the EAP* having nonmanual jobs*
Chile	1970	246	85	15
India	1970	288	97	7
Iran	1970	1,031	97	5
Thailand	1970	745	88	5
Malaysia	1975	1,610	74	12
Mexico	1975	121	97	11
Sri Lanka	1978	36	75	6
Great Britain	1970	875	58	39
Japan	1970	957	71	42
USA	1970	1,956	86	51

*economically active population

[1] Most of the literature on students' attitudes to employment makes a clear distinction between 'expectations' and 'aspirations'. In the English language, there is a clear difference in meaning and in the research design of all the data presented here an attempt was made to concentrate on 'expectations' and not 'aspirations'. However not all the languages into which these questions were translated maintain the distinction so clearly. See Little [1978] pp 58–62 for further discussion.

[2] The data from Malaysia was collected by Keith Lewin, from Mexico by Nigel Brooke and from Sri Lanka by Angela Little.

let us remember that in the developing countries in this table most secondary schools are situated near, or in, urban centres and that many of the students attending them are boarding students, their parents living many miles away in rural areas.

The striking feature of the table is the very large proportion of students in each country (perhaps with the exception of Great Britain) who expect to gain a nonmanual job when they leave the school system. What are their chances of realising these expectations? One quick way of assessing the realisation of expectations is to compare the percentage of students expecting nonmanual jobs and the percentage of the entire economically active population with such jobs. The proportions of the economically active populations of each country having nonmanual occupations are shown in column 4 of Table 1. The mismatch between these two percentages shown in columns 3 and 4 is severe for all the developing countries and rather less severe for the developed countries.

But this very crude comparison is inadequate. Comparing proportions of the EAP with proportions of 14 year old students disguises the possibility that a school system is so selective before the age of 14 that the absolute number of students with nonmanual job expectations is exactly equal to the number of nonmanual jobs available.

So, not only must we estimate the absolute numbers of students leaving the education system with these nonmanual expectations, we must also attempt to estimate the absolute numbers of nonmanual job slots which are likely to be available. Just as the percentages in column 3 do not really tell how many students have nonmanual expectations, so too column 4 does not tell us how many nonmanual jobs are likely to be available. It is conceivable, for example, that 20 per cent of the EAP has nonmanual jobs. But the people occupying these positions may be very young and the economic activity giving rise to these positions may be stagnant. This would mean that few nonmanual job slots would become available through either i) deaths or retirements or ii) economic growth.

Table 2 attempts to estimate the number of nonmanual job vacancies likely to arise in any one year (column 4), and to compare this figure with the absolute output of students from the education system expecting these nonmanual jobs.

The figures on availability of nonmanual jobs represent an addition of i) vacancies created through deaths and retirements and ii) vacancies which arise through economic and job growth. Death and retirement rates are difficult to locate but available data suggest that a figure of 2 per cent is a generous estimate [Dore, Humphrey and West 1976].

Vacancies arising through growth in jobs are calculated by applying the growth rate over the previous few years to the total number of nonmanual jobs in the year of the particular survey. For the purpose of this analysis jobs falling into the first three categories of the ILO occupational classification were counted as nonmanual jobs—

Table 2

The demand for nonmanual jobs and their availability

	1 *no of 14 year old students*	*2* *% of 14 year old students expecting nonmanual jobs*	*3* *no of 14 year old students expecting nonmanual jobs*	*4* *no nonmanual jobs available*	*5* *accommodation rate %*
Chile 1970	150,000	85	127,500	29,000	22
India 1970	3,428,000	97	3,187,575	605,300	18
Iran 1970	176,100	97	170,817	34,000	20
Thailand 1970	220,100	88	194,000	42,600	22
Malaysia 1975	124,000	74	91,751	29,300	32
Mexico 1975	417,669	99	413,492	208,00	42
Sri Lanka 1978	180,000	75	134,562	25,000	19
Great Britain 1970	757,700	58	439,000	516,900	117
Japan 1970	1,578,000	71	1,120,380	986,700	88
USA 1970	4,010,000	85	3,408,500	1,762,000	51

Sources: A detailed listing of sources for seven rows of this data is available in Little [1978].
The most common sources for data in columns 1, 4 and 5 are the *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* and the *ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, various years.

professional, managerial and administrative, and clerical. Column 5 shows the object of the entire exercise which is a comparison of the jobs available with the job expectations. We shall call this figure the 'accommodation rate'.

What is striking in Table 2 is the very high accommodation rates for Britain and Japan, the relatively lower rate for the USA and the consistently low rates for all the developing countries, with the exception perhaps of Mexico. A number of earlier studies in England bear out our observation in Table 2 and have noted with 'dismay' the 'realism' of the aspirations and expectations of secondary school leavers [Timperley and Gregory 1971, Liversedge 1962]. Roberts writes that 'it is a well established fact that British school leavers' ambitions are realistically modest' [1968]. Similarly, Turner contrasts research evidence from England and the USA. 'Researchers in the United States consistently show that the general level of occupational aspiration reported by high school students is quite unrealistic in relation to the actual distribution of job opportunities. Comparative study in England shows much less 'phantasy' aspiration . . .' [Turner 1971].

By contrast, the observation that the economies of many developing countries are unable to satisfy the particular job expectations of students has also been noted many times before, and the feeling that students in developing countries are 'unrealistic' about their futures has become the conventional wisdom. Indeed, because of this 'unrealism' some researchers implore the students to be 'realistic' when answering the research question on job expectations.

For example,

> *'looking* **realistically** *at your future how would you regard your chances of continuing your education beyond Form 4?'* [Anderson 1969]

In a similar vein, Clignet and Foster [1966] ask:

> *'if you finish your studies this year, describe the kind of occupation that you will be most likely to enter in fact. Take into account your own knowledge of the situation and the experience of your friends. Be as realistic and precise as possible'.*

Realism **versus** unrealism is one way of explaining away the difference between the accommodation rates in different countries. But is it sufficient? Indeed, is it a fair explanation at all?

In the next four sections we will present additional partial explanations for why the accommodation rates in some countries appear to be so much higher than in others. These particular explanations will concentrate on the students and their perceptions of reality rather than on those factors affecting the other part of the accommodation rate, ie the numbers and rates of growth of nonmanual jobs.

Factor 1: The Perception of Income Differentials

One obvious explanation for why the accommodation rates for nonmanual job expectations are lower in developing countries has to do with the desirability of nonmanual jobs in terms of income, as compared with the rest of the jobs in the labour market. If the income from jobs at the top of the work hierarchy is considerably greater than income from the lower level jobs then it is a perfectly rational strategy for students to aim for those jobs. The difference between the top and the bottom of the job hierarchy is indicated approximately by the distribution of total income in a country. Table 3 shows these distributions:

Table 3 **GNP per capita and income distribution**

		average income share			
	per capita GNP US $ (1969)	*lowest 40%*	*middle 40%*	*top 20%*	*difference lowest–top*
Mexico	645	11	25	64	53
Malaysia	330	12	32	56	44
Chile	510	13	30	57	44
Iran	350	13	33	54	41
India	110	16	32	52	36
Sri Lanka	99	17	37	46	29
Thailand	160	17	38	45	28
Great Britain	1,890	19	43	39	20
Japan	1,430	21	39	40	19
USA	4,240	20	42	39	19

Source: Ahluwalia [1974]

A comparison of this table with the accommodation rates shown in Table 2 reveals that the seven developing countries in our sample not only have the lowest accommodation rates, they also have the highest income inequality. But the income explanation is clearly not sufficient in itself. One only has to note that the two developing countries with the highest income inequality (Mexico and Malaysia) are the very two which, among the developing country group, have the highest accommodation rates.

The position of Mexico and Malaysia at the top of the income inequality rankings, with relatively high accommodation rates, is suggestive of at least two other factors. First, it may be that developing countries with a high concentration of income among the top 20 per cent are able to create employment of the kind expected by students (nonmanual, professional and semi-professional) faster than developing countries with a more even distribution of income. This faster rate of growth would make for high accommodation rates. Second, it could be that countries with high income inequality are more restrictive in the numbers of children enrolled in the secondary stage of education, this restriction being conducive to high accommodation rates. A quick glance at comparative figures reveals the greater plausibility of the first argument rather than the second. Using the UNESCO definitions of second level education, we find the three developing countries with the greatest income inequality are also three of the four developing countries with the highest enrolment ratios at secondary level. The rate of growth of nonmanual jobs, on the other hand, reveals high figures of 5·6 per cent per annum for Mexico and Malaysia and lower rates for the other developing countries.

Factor 2: Perceptions of Security

Perhaps more important than the level of income is the security of employment that the job affords, and security is more likely to be found among nonmanual occupations than manual.

Nonmanual jobs tend to be salaried, with a yearly payment in monthly instalments. Few manual jobs are salaried. Most manual work in developing countries is not even paid work in the sense of there being an employer-employee relationship. Indeed most manual work in developing countries is in the agricultural or 'informal' sectors where most people are self employed. Self employment brings with it no security of income. On the other hand, the manual jobs which do count as employee jobs generally involve a weekly or daily wage, or some form of piecerate earnings and the relative insecurity of wage payments derives from its association with firing practices and permanency of employment. While temporary employment exists in both nonmanual and manual categories, permanent employment is much more likely to be offered with nonmanual jobs. Nonmanual jobs are more likely to be offered to the person on the understanding that the job is his or hers until he or she chooses to change it. Added to this is the fact that even where permanent manual jobs are offered, should the employer wish to fire the employee, the period of notice is likely to be considerably less than that given to a permanent employee in a nonmanual job.

These broad characterisations fit the situation in developed countries as well as in developing countries—so how do we use perceptions of security as an explanation of the lower accommodation rates in the developing countries? Three factors are important here. The number of jobs in developing countries which count as manual and which are also regarded by the employer as temporary is likely to be proportionately much larger than for the developed countries. Second, even if one does hold a 'permanent' manual wage job the chances of being fired may be much greater than in developed countries; and finally, the financial implication of loss of job and unemployment is much more severe. 'Social security', 'dole', 'welfare payments', as institutionalised forms of welfare to those out of work exists in a much weaker and materially poorer form.[3]

Factor 3: Historical Precedent and the Right to a Non-Manual Job

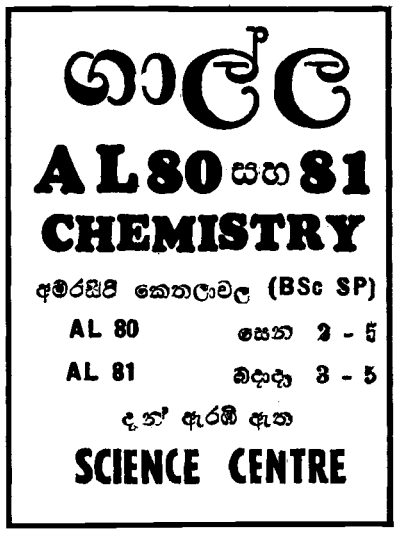
The students whose job expectations and job opportunities we are discussing have all reached the age of 14 and have all reached the eighth or ninth grade. In Great Britain, Japan, and the USA, to have reached the eighth or ninth grade of the school system is nothing unusual—it would be unusual not to have done so. In the developing countries listed in Tables 1 and 2, on the other hand, it is the minority of children who reach this point in the education system. Given the total age cohort of 14 year olds, it is something of an achievement to have survived the pressures to drop out of the school system.

[3] Some would argue here that the family system in developing countries is much more supportive than in developed countries and that the effects of unemployment, even where there is little or no social security benefit, are less severe than we think. While this is certainly true in the short term, the economic strains it puts on a family probably already poor, will in the long term be very great.

Not only is it fairly unusual for students in developing countries to be aged 14 and still be in the school system, but the presumption that this amount of education 'entitles' one to a nonmanual job is probably greater in developing than developed countries for the following reasons.

i) It is a reasonable assumption that parents in all countries pass on to their children their own attitudes. Specifically, they will pass on their own perceptions of what eight or nine years of education promise. In developing countries 30 years ago, it was probably not uncommon for the majority of the 14 year olds who were fortunate enough to be in the education system, both to expect and attain nonmanual jobs. Young people both inside and outside the formal education system will make this link between attendance at secondary school and a nonmanual job. In the developed countries 30 years ago, however, a smaller proportion of those aged 14 and in the education system expected and attained nonmanual jobs. The time when the majority of students in developed countries had nonmanual job expectations and realised them would have been the lifetimes of the grandparents or great-grandparents of today's 14 year olds. The pass-on effect of attitudes and expectations about one's job 'entitlement' from grandparent to student is naturally much weaker. So the main factor is the ratio between the jobs available and the numbers of children in the educational system. The ratio of the rate of growth of the secondary education system to the rate of growth of nonmanual jobs is further from unity in the developing countries than in the developed countries.

ii) The expectations of students are not only moulded by their parents, but reinforced by the prevailing ideology surrounding the purposes of education. This factor helps to explain the differences between Great Britain on the one hand and the developing countries and the USA on the other. It is only recently that the ideology of British education has had anything to do with the promotion of social mobility—education as a channel for achieving high status in a society. Until the ideology of 'equality of opportunity' in 1944, the school system was not presented to students as a means for achieving a social status different from their parents. The rhetoric of 'equality of opportunity' was applied to the British education system only late in its evolution, and probably reflected the rigid social class-based nature of the British education system. In the developing countries, on the other hand, the notion that both lower and upper class children should have equality of opportunity to achieve the same level of education and the same status in society, is very strong, and certainly much stronger than in Great Britain. In the USA, like the developing countries, the ideology of a socially mobile society and of education as one of the chief means of achieving that mobility is pervasive. The American 14 year old student, by contrast with his British counterpart, does not 'know his place', and expects of himself what others expect of him—and that is to achieve high status in society. (Of course we should note here the difference between the perception and rhetoric of the education system as a channel for social mobility—and its actual effectiveness as a means for social mobility.)



Advert for private tuition in a Sinhala Sunday Newspaper.

Factor 4: Internal School Structure and Examinations

The internal structure of the school system can be highly instrumental in transmitting the values and expectations of the wider society to the students within the system. This 'hidden curriculum' is often taught much more effectively than the official curriculum. In his 'Typology for the classification of educational systems', Hopper [1971] makes a distinction between those education systems which i) select early in the educational career and those which ii) differentiate students into specialised training routes. In Great Britain, the system of grammar and secon-

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Sri Lanka. Grade 2 children in a government primary school (left) and grade 12 students attending a weekend private tutory (above). Job expectations increase the drive for qualifications.

dary modern school overshadowing the comprehensive system at the time when the 1970 data was collected, is an example of both of these features. Early selection at the age of 11 channelled students either to the academic grammar schools or the more practical and 'vocational' secondary modern schools. Not only was there separation of the two types of school but, within both types, there was achievement streaming and there coexisted two systems of national examinations which corresponded roughly to the two types of school. The 14 year olds in Great Britain in 1970 were a heterogeneous group, differentiated by the school structure, and by knowing from a very early age that different things were expected of them in the future.

But some recent data from Great Britain suggests that even after the reorganisation of schools the occupational expectations of students may not have changed. Data collected in 1978 by this author from an 'average' comprehensive school revealed that only 43 per cent of the 14 year old students expected to attain nonmanual jobs. A closer look look at the school reveals that a new form of streaming, called 'setting' obtains. Under this system students are divided into different achievement groups for different subjects and although they are not necessarily allocated to the same ranked set for every subject, there is a very high degree of overlap. Not only does this streaming persist but by the age of 14 the students are requested by the school to choose their 'subject options'. Some options are not open to all. Alongside the subject and achievement streaming is the dual examination system, or perhaps more correctly the tripartite system—the O-level exam, the CSE exam and the non-exam. (Some children in the lowest 'sets' sit no exam at all.)

Compare this internal school system with that of Japan where, although there is no streaming in the secondary schools, teacher expectations of students are transmitted via the vocational guidance programme which is in operation in all schools. By the age of 14, the students' parents will have been visited by the teacher who will have advised the parents about the child's chances of progression—to what level and type of further educational institute, and to what type of occupation. Vocational guidance ensures reinforcement of the differentiated social structure at an early age. Not only is there an internal vocational guidance programme but the perceived quality of different schools is apparent from the primary school stage. In Japan, the primary school one enters gives one a reasonable chance of predicting one's chances of reaching a particular secondary school and a particular university. The differentiation of the school system takes on a different form from that in Great

Britain, but both can be compared with the other countries in Tables 1 and 2.

Generally speaking, schools in the developing countries tend not to follow rigid achievement streaming policies, either between or within schools. Once inside the secondary school, low achieving students are often not separated from high achieving students, and when they are separated into streams, the separation does not imply that different examinations will be sat. Similarly, there may be differences between schools in their average quality and success in the examinations, but nonetheless the schools are all aiming at the same examination or school leaving certificate, the all important measure of success.

Of the seven developing countries there is considerable variety in the age at which the first selection takes place. In Chile, India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, the first official selection occurs after the age of 14 either at 15 or 16. It is an 'official selection' because, of course, prior to the selection point there is considerable drop-out of students, for a variety of reasons. In Mexico, Thailand, and Iran, the first selection has taken place before the age of 14—but in Thailand and Mexico the selection ratio of the exams, which in both cases are set and marked by the school teachers and not by a national body, is high. In the USA too, there is no explicit streaming policy and the vast majority of students expect to progress through the system to the age of 18. In other words, all these 14 year old students perceive themselves to be in the same school system, with similar chances of success in the occupational system. They are a fairly homogeneous bunch of students.

But selection has at least two meanings. In the case of Mexico, selection at grade 6 means that some children continue their education while others do not. But selection can also mean selection for different **kinds** of education. All the countries mentioned in this paper have some measure of 'vocational' **versus** 'academic' tracking in their secondary school systems. Some countries siphon off some students into special streams within the same institution. We noted earlier that prior to the comprehensive school programme, students in England were, at the age of eleven, tracked into different institutions—but as the 1978 data from a comprehensive school suggests, the proportion of students expecting nonmanual jobs is as low, if not lower, than before. This suggests that the important distinction on the academic-vocational dimension is not whether students study in different institutions but whether the **majority** of students are deemed to be on the academic or the vocational track. As far as the developing countries are concerned, it is probably true to say that in each case, where provision is made for 'vocational' options it is only the minority of students who follow such courses—perhaps, being in the minority, such students still identify themselves with the majority and imitate their expectations.

This section on internal school structure has raised many more questions than it has answered. The five dimensions of internal school structure which have been raised are put forward as suggestions or possible explanations—the data presented here are too few to arrive at firm conclusions. The dimensions discussed were i) the age at which first selection take place; ii) the differentiation of students into specialised training routes; iii) the differentiation of the national examination structure; iv) the degree to which the majority of secondary school students follow the academic or vocational streams; v) the presence or absence of a vocational guidance programme.

There are undoubtedly many more factors which could be put forward as partial explanations for country differences in expectations. The object of this paper has been to draw attention to four major differences between the economic and education systems, which may help us to understand the intricate bases on which the rationales of students about employment rest. It is hoped that by drawing attention to structural elements in the world outside the school, as well as the structure of the school system itself, the 'unrealistic' expectations of students will not be dismissed simply as irrational hopes, whose frustration is their own responsibility.

A second and perhaps more immediate object of the paper has been to demonstrate a very simple numerical exercise which is rarely executed by ministries of education or employment around the world. Such basic information, comparing outputs from the education system with potential inputs to the labour market, would provide a basis for discussions between those education ministry officials who declare 'unemployment is not our problem' and those employment and labour officials who blame the education system for providing an irrelevant education for the mass of 'unemployed'. The calculation presented at the beginning of this paper should not of course be confined to 14 year olds—it should be extended to all levels of the education and employment system, and it need not necessarily

involve surveys of student expectations. Dore, Humphrey and West [1976] carry out a similar analysis for 25 countries on the basis of school enrolments and not of student expectations.

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